

Wetlands and wildlife

When explorers and settlers first crossed the wet prairies of eastern South Dakota they were greeted by clouds of waterfowl that had depended on the region for breeding and migration for more than 10,000 years.

The most productive duck nesting grounds of all - an area that often produced twenty or more broods to the square mile - were the glaciated grasslands of the northern Great Plains, studded with potholes, sloughs, and shallow marshes that made ideal habitat for mallards, pintails, canvasbacks, and other ducks of more than a dozen species The spring and autumn migrations of the waterfowl were awe-inspiring sites to the first explorers who saw them. From the ... prairie sloughs and potholes still unseen by white men, swans, geese and ducks ... streamed southward each fall to concentrate by the millions on the bays, marshes, and rivers of the South. (5)

Despite extensive wetland drainage and loss of upland nesting cover, the prairie pothole region of eastern South Dakota remains one of the most productive waterfowl breeding areas of North America. It is the **combination** of small and shallow wetlands with larger and deeper wetlands that makes eastern South Dakota so attractive to breeding ducks.

Temporary and seasonal wetlands, most less than half an acre in size, thaw quickly in the spring. Pairs of dabbling ducks—species such as mallards, pintails, and blue-winged teal—will seek seclusion from other members of their species when they are preparing to nest. They find this privacy on small wetlands. These small wetlands also provide a rich source of aquatic insects, snails, and other invertebrates. Hens need this protein- and calcium-rich food to produce eggs.

A series of wet years on the prairies, when small, shallow wetlands hold water throughout the breeding season, can result in continental duck population explosions.



Western grebes nest on floating platforms in large semipermanent wetlands

Overview of Wetland Resources

Deeper wetlands, that thaw later and hold water throughout the summer in most years, attract different ducks. These deeper wetlands provide breeding habitat for diving ducks such as canvasbacks and redheads.

Later in the season, many dabbling ducks will lead their broods to these deeper wetlands. And in the fall, migrating ducks and geese interrupt their southward journey to rest and feed on these wetlands, making eastern South Dakota a waterfowl management area of international importance and a paradise for waterfowl hunters.

Besides ducks, over 100 fish, 80 bird, 25 mammal, 17 amphibian, and 10 reptile species depend on eastern South Dakota wetlands. Some upland wildlife, such as ring-necked pheasants and white-tailed deer, use wetlands during the winter to survive prolonged cold and blizzards. Winter wind velocities in wetlands may be 95% less than in nearby shelterbelts, making wetlands valuable winter cover for many resident wildlife species.



Yellow-headed blackbird



Leopard frog



Blue-winged teal feed on invertebrates in shallow wetlands



Wetlands, important winter habitat for resident wildlife



Over 220 species of fish and wildlife, like these western painted turtles, inhabit eastern South Dakota wetlands

Wetlands provide habitat for more than 200 species of wildlife that live in or migrate through eastern South Dakota. Some species are listed below (a number in () indicates the number of species or subspecies).

Birds

Mallard	Gadwall	Blue-winged teal	Pintail
Wood duck	Shoveler	Wigeon	Green-winged teal
Redhead	Canvasback	Lesser scaup	Greater scaup
Bufflehead	Ring-necked duck	Common goldeneye	Ruddy duck
Hooded merganser	Common merganser	Canada goose (4)	Tundra swan
White-fronted goose	Snow goose	Ross's goose	Ring-necked pheasant
Osprey	Northern harrier	Bald eagle	Horned grebe
Eared grebe	Red-necked grebe	Western grebe	Pied-billed grebe
Black-crowned night heron	Little blue heron	Cattle egret	Snowy egret
Great egret	Yellow-crowned night heron	Green-backed heron	Great blue heron
Least bittern	Sora	White-faced ibis	American bittern
Sandhill crane	Whooping crane	Virginia rail	American coot
Black tern	Common tern	Least tern	Forster's tern
Ring-billed gull	Franklin's gull	Caspian tern	Herring gull
Black-bellied plover	Semipalmated plover	Bonaparte's gull	Killdeer
Greater yellowlegs	Solitary sandpiper	Piping plover	Lesser yellowlegs
Marbled godwit	Hudsonian godwit	Spotted sandpiper	Willet
Common snipe	Sanderling	American avocet	Ruddy turnstone
Least sandpiper	White-rumped sandpiper	Semipalmated sandpiper	Western sandpiper
Pectoral sandpiper	Short-billed dowitcher	Dunlin	Baird's sandpiper
Stilt sandpiper	Marsh wren	Long-billed dowitcher	Spotted sandpiper
Red-necked phalarope	Red-winged blackbird	Sedge wren	Wilson's phalarope
Double-crested cormorant	Le Conte's sparrow	Yellow-headed blackbird	White pelican
Bank swallow	Savannah sparrow	Swamp sparrow	Belted kingfisher
Common yellowthroat	Rough-winged swallow	Common grackle	Willow flycatcher

Mammals

Muskrat	Beaver	Mink	Raccoon
White-tailed deer	Coyote	Red fox	Long-tailed weasel
Least weasel	Stripped skunk	Cottontail	Short-tailed shrew
Masked shrew	Pygmy shrew	Arctic shrew	Water shrew
Southern bog lemming	Western harvest mouse	Meadow vole	Prairie vole
Meadow jumping mouse	Deer mouse	Southern red-backed vole	Grasshopper mouse
White-footed mouse			

Reptiles and Amphibians

Western painted turtle	Snapping turtle	False map turtle	Blanding's turtle
Plains spadefoot toad	Softshell turtle (2)	Garter snake (3)	Northern water snake
Chorus frog (2)	Canadian toad	American toad	Woodhouse's toad
Tiger salamander (3)	Great Plains toad	Crickit frog	Gray tree frog
Mudpuppy	Leopard frog (2)	Wood frog	Bullfrog

Fish

Sturgeon (2)	Paddlefish	Gar (2)	American eel
Herring (2)	Gizzard shad	Goldeye	Mooneye
Stoneroller	Carp (3)	European rudd	West silvery minnow
Brassy minnow	Plains minnow	Chubs (6)	Shiners (13)
Suckermouth minnow	Bluntnose minnow	Fathead minnow	Dace (4)
Buffalo (3)	River carpsucker	Quillback	Suckers (3)
Black bullhead	Shorthead redhorse	Northern hog sucker	Blue catfish
Stonecat	Yellow bullhead	Brown bullhead	Channel catfish
Burbot	Tadpole madtom	Flathead catfish	Trout-perch
White bass	Banded killifish	Plains topminnow	Brook stickleback
Bluegill	Rock bass	Green sunfish	Orangespotted sunfish
Black crappie	Smallmouth bass	Largemouth bass	White crappie
Sauger	Darters (3)	Logperch	Walleye
Chinook salmon	Yellow perch	Freshwater drum	Coho salmon
Rainbow smelt	Brown trout	Rainbow trout	Lake whitefish
Central mudminnow	Northern pike	Muskellunge	Grass pickerel

Endangered and Threatened Species

Piping plover	Least tern	Osprey	Bald eagle
Whooping crane	Blanding's turtle	False map turtle	Topeka shiner